

# THE CHRIST CHILD'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT.

By MAY C. RINGWOLT.



HE, with her sweet young enthusiasm, told them of the first Christmastide—of the Christ Child cradled in the manger because there was no room in the inn; of the Christmas carol of peace and good will sung by the angels to the shepherds watching their flocks by night.

Clarice's face was rapt; her eyes adoring. Of all the teachers in the Sunday-school, none was so lovely as her own Miss Maud. She was certain that the Christmas angels had the same shining yellow hair. Did they



wear those fascinating gold hairpins, too? One was slipping out from the soft fluff over Miss Maud's left ear. If only she dared tell her! But that morning she had asked the awful privilege of holding Miss Maud's muff—a rich sable with a beautiful bunch of violets fastened to it—and there was no courage left for further intimate speech. Suddenly the spell was broken, and Clarice turned with angry jerk from the object of her worship, and fiercely scowled at an inoffensive little girl seated beside her.

"Excuse me," meekly apologized Agnes, the new scholar.

Clarice drew her light blue silk skirts away from the dingy brown cashmere touching them; held herself very straight; and, with a superb dignity, sniffed the violets on the muff.

"And now, my dears," said Miss Maud, "as you know, Wednesday will be another birthday of the Christ Child, and who wants every one here to give Him a present—just as you would give a present to your own little brother on his birthday at home." She smiled radiantly. "Do you wonder how you can do that when the Christ Child has become a King in Heaven? I'll tell you. He left in His place all the poor little girls and boys in this big world, and told us that in giving to them we give to Him. Not far away is a great hos-

pital for little children who have crippled legs and arms, and poor, crooked backs, sick children who can't run and play, but have to hobble about on crutches or lie in bed all day. Wouldn't you like to make their Christmas so happy that they'd forget their pain?"

Her smile gathered up their eager nods of assent, as a golden thread gathering pearls. "I knew you would. Well, I'm going to tell you a secret. She leaned confidentially near. "The day before Christmas we're to have a dear little service down here, and over there on the platform will be an empty manger, and, as we sing our Christmas carols, we are going to march up to the manger and each put in a gift for some little Christ child at the hospital. Won't we have a jolly time deciding what to bring? Why, it will be almost as exciting as if every girl of you were playing Santa Claus!"

Again Clarice's smiling face was clouded by a scowl, and one rude elbow poked the new scholar's arm.

"Clarice!" exclaimed Miss Maud, severely.

"She's crowding me!" defended a sulky voice.

Miss Maud looked up at the little brown figure shrinking back into a corner. The child's eyes were luminous; her face flushed, her lips parted. "Agnes was so intently listening to me that I'm sure she didn't realize that she was leaning against anyone. I'm surprised at you, Clarice!" A cheek hid its shamed crimson in the soft muff. To have Miss Maud "surprised" at you was ignominy itself! Her tears wet the violets. It was all Agnes' fault. She would never forgive her—never!

And when Sunday-school was over and Agnes, with a timid smile, asked if she might walk up the street with Clarice, that unladylike little girl slipped her arm through that of her chum, Anabel, and, whispering and giggling, stalked by Agnes without a word.

The tears came into Agnes' eyes,



for mother would not let her play with the little girls in the new neighborhood into which they had moved, because the children there were rough and boisterous, and used naughty words, and she was very lonely. But she was a brave little soul, and dashing away the tears, she was soon skipping along in the sunshine, think-

ing what a lucky girl she was to have two lively legs, and a straight, strong back.

Agnes remembered the time, before dear father's death, when they lived in a cunning cottage of their own on a pretty avenue, but now mother and she had only one room at the top of a gloomy house on a forlorn back street. Still, as her feet clattered up the dark, uncarpeted stairs, her heart was full of happiness because she had reached home at last—for even one room is home when mother is there.

"Oh, mother," exclaimed Agnes, "I've so much to tell you!" And cuddled in mother's lap, an arm about her neck, a hand patting her cheek, Agnes sweetly prattled of the Christ Child of old, and how His birthday was to be kept by giving presents to poor, sick little children left in His place. "And, mother," she cried, "I'm going to give a doll just like my own dear Peggy! Do you think, mother dear—if I sewed, too, you know—you could get the dollie dressed in time?"

The smile faded from mother's lips, and the arm about her girlie trembled. "My dear little Agnes," she murmured, with a catch in her voice, "mother is so sorry to disappoint you." She paused, then bravely went on. "Agnes has grown to be such a little woman that mother is going to explain everything to her. You know, dear, for three whole weeks mother had no work to do."

"Yes," chimed in Agnes, gaily, "and it was just beautiful! We took long walks, and, in the evening, instead of the stupid sewing, you told me the loveliest stories!"

"But, love," explained mother, with a sad smile, "when there is no work there is no pay—no money to buy



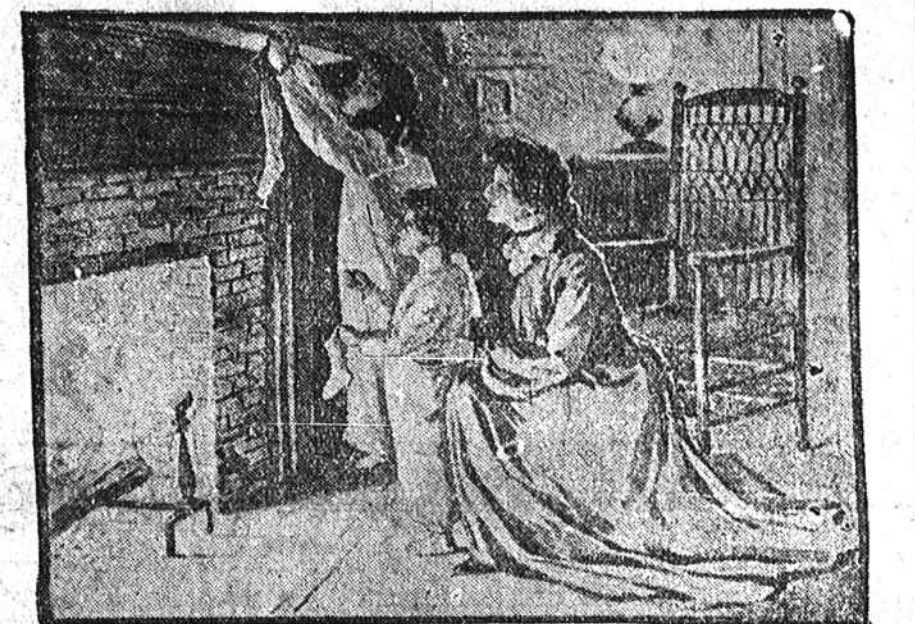
The door softly opened, and a little brown shadow of a girl with a small pink object hugged to her breast slipped timidly in. For a moment Agnes stood dazed, as if she had suddenly entered fairyland, for the bare walls of the room were festooned with heavy ropes of Christmas greens, the shades at the windows were drawn, and all the chandeliers brilliantly lighted, while above the awaiting manger shone a glorious electric star. Then, ashamed of being so late, she hurriedly tiptoed to her place, the vacant seat beside Clarice.

Clarice met her with a cold stare, but the gaze of Agnes' eyes never reached the unkind little girl's face, for it rested in fascinated awe upon a vision of beauty in Clarice's arms. It was a doll such as fairies might dream of. She had dark, clustering curls, and magnificent brown eyes. Her cheeks glowed with color, and there was the cunningest dimple in her round chin. She was dressed in claret velvet trimmed in white silk, and wore a claret velvet poke bonnet with white silk strings and an exquisite white plume gracefully touching the brown curls on the right side. And best of all, she had a necklace of gold beads, and gold bead bracelets dangling over her hands.

"Oh," murmured Agnes, "won't your little hospital girl be pleased?"

"My little hospital girl!" scornfully whispered back Clarice. "You don't suppose I'd give my best doll away! Here's my present!"—she held

## HANGING THE STOCKING.



anything to eat nor coal to keep us warm."

"We ate every day, though, mother dear, and most generally always we had a fire."

"Yes, dear, because a kind man let us have all that we needed, and trusted mother to pay for it when she got work again. So, you see, Agnes, the money that mother is making now does not really belong to us, but every cent must go to pay our debts."

A small head solemnly nodded.

"It hurts mother very much not to give her darling any Christmas toys nor let her girlie's kind heart have its wish about the dollie for the poor sick little child at the hospital, but Agnes will try to be a good little girl about it, won't she?"

The arms about mother's neck tightened their hold, but Agnes' mouth twitched, and she had to blink very hard to keep back the tears. If she had no present to lay in the Christmas manger, how would the Christ Child know that she loved Him? "Of course," she argued to herself, "I could 'plain in my prayers that I had nothing to give."

But had she nothing? Her face suddenly crimsoned, and a great lump choked her little throat. There was Peggy herself!

Without speaking, she got down from mother's lap, and darted across the room to her little bed. There, propped up by a pillow, sat Peggy in a stiff pink calico dress. The curls had all been combed out of Peggy's straggling hair; the roses had long ago faded from her cheeks, and in a sad accident Perry had parted company with the end of her nose.

"You dear!" whispered Agnes. Her lips formed a determined line. How could she have thought of giving Peggy up! What would she do all day without a dollie to play with? What would she do at night without a dollie to sleep on the pillow beside her? But a disappointed sick little girl at the hospital would be Christmas morning when all the children had lovely presents, and she four, that she had been left out. Agnes stooped over the bed, kissed Peggy in her arms, and pressed her to her aching heart.

out a box of jack-straws—"Lady Lucile and I simply stopped in." She airily tossed her head. "We're on our way to a Christmas Eve party."

"Form in line, my dears," interrupted Miss Maud, briskly. "Yes, our class comes last, but you must sing all the time we're marching."

The children's voices caroled joyously as the procession pressed forward, but one little singer was mute. She was the last in the line, a little brown shadow of a girl with a small pink object hugged to her breast. Miss Maud stood by the manger, now heaped with all sorts of playthings, and nodded and smiled as each wee member of her class approached. Puzzled, she watched Agnes pause, look at the manger with frightened eyes, and hesitate. Then she saw the small pink object lifted to the child's lips, and heard the sound of a smacking kiss of farewell before trembling hands laid a doll with straggly hair, faded cheeks and a broken nose among the new toys.

"Why, my dear," cried Miss Maud, putting her arms about Agnes, "what is the matter?"

A great sob shook the tiny figure. "Tell me all about it," comforted Miss Maud.

And Agnes brokenly confided the whole story. But as she explained how mother's money belonged to somebody else, and how she had nothing to give the Christ Child except her only doll, neither of them noticed a little listener who drew nearer and nearer.

"No, no," cried Agnes, "I wouldn't take her back. I want the little hospital girl to have her—she'll prelate Peggy's crippled nose, won't she?" Agnes forced a smile through her tears. "Only," she faltered, "it will be so—so lonesome without any doll—ie."

Something tugged at Miss Maud's skirts. She turned, and with a start of surprise, looked down into Clarice's eager face.

"I've lots more at home, you know," she whispered. And, laying Lady Lucile in Agnes' astonished arms, Clarice ran after her chum, Anabel.—The Interior.

## For Family of Two.

Oyster Soup, Gherkins, Roast Duck, Apple-and-Celery Salad, Potatoes, Scalloped, with Grated Onion, Squash, Plum Pudding, Hard Sauce, Tangerine Oranges, Grapes, Coffee.

# The Sunday-School

INTERNATIONAL LESSON COMMENTS FOR DECEMBER 20.

Subject: Christmas and Its Lesson.  
Luke 2:8-20—Golden Text.  
Luke 2:11—Commit Verses 8-10—Commentary.

TIME.—December, B. C. 5. PLACE.—Bethlehem.

EXPOSITION.—I. The Shepherds Told of the Birth of Christ the Lord, 8-14. Seven hundred years before, Micah had prophesied that He that was to "be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth are from of old, from everlasting" was to come out of Bethlehem (Mic. 5:2). Note how many decrees and deeds of men, unconscious of God's purpose and prophecy, worked together to fulfill God's word, and carry out His eternal plan. The Saviour of the world, the Christ, the Lord, began in a stable the life He was to close upon the cross. There was "no room" for Him in the inn. There is "no room" for Him to-day in the hearts of most men, in the home, in business, in society, in politics. The announcement of the advent of the King was made to shepherds. The shepherds proved their fitness to receive the announcement (v. 15). They were men of faith, with a deep appreciation of spiritual truth, in spite of their lowly position. They seem to have been waiting, longing, looking for the coming of the Christ (v. 16). They were faithfully attending to their lowly duties when the revelation came. It was not pleasant work, but it was their work, and while at it the angels met them (comp. Ex. 3:1, 2; Judg. 6:11, 12; 1 K. 19:19; Luke 1:8, 11). The glory that shone around them was the ancient Shekinah that betokened God's presence. At a later day the disciples were to behold the glory of God in the person of Jesus Himself (Jno. 1:14; 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:6). The shepherds were "sore afraid" when they beheld this glory. The supernatural by bringing God near, always fills the heart of sinful man with fear (R. 1:17; Luke 5:8; Isa. 6:5). But an angelic message at once dispelled fear. They came to announce salvation, not judgment. They began with one of God's most frequent messages to men, "fear not." But the angels not only bade them "fear not," but brought forward the only real cure for fear, the Gospel. They brought "good tidings of great joy." The coming of Jesus the Saviour, Christ and Lord, is the best news this old, sin-cursed and Satan-governed world ever heard. It was a strange place to be sent to seek a king—a barn. And it was a strange sign to mark "a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord"—"babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, and lying in a manger." The world receives this wonderful proclamation to this day with indifference, but the heavenly army received it with exultant shouts of praise to God. Well they might! The word "suddenly" shows that they could hardly restrain themselves until the message was fully delivered. They all but interrupted their spokesman's proclamation with their glad chorus. There was to be a twofold result of the Saviour's birth—"glory to God in the highest," "on earth peace among men of His good pleasure."

II. The Shepherds Hastening to Find the Christ, 15, 16. The shepherds, though humble and illiterate, were wise men. They showed it by believing God's word and going to see for themselves the glorious truth that had been proclaimed to them. Of the truth of what had been told them they had not a doubt. They spoke of it as "this thing" (or word) which is come to pass. Wise and happy the men who when God tells him anything counts it done (Luke 1:45; Jno. 20:29). They knew it was so because the Lord had made it known. That is faith (Heb. 11:1, R. V.; see context). They did not "go" to test the truth of the word of God, but to "see" what they already fully believed. When God makes any great fact or truth known to us we should at once believe it and then "go and see this word which the Lord hath made known to us," i. e., enter into it experimentally. Note the eagerness and whole-heartedness of these shepherd-saints, "they came with haste." Surely they will rise up in the judgment against our cold-hearted slowness in appropriating the fullness of blessings that God makes known to us. "They came with haste" to find the Christ, but to-day men will scarce come at all; and, if they do, it is with such reluctance that they must be urged and almost pulled to the Saviour's feet. These shepherds were rare souls. They found in the manger just as God said it would be (v. 1, cf. v. 20; ch. 19:32; Acts 27:25). Therein a "babe lying in the manger" they gazed upon the One who was to be the Christ of God and Saviour of the world.

III. The Shepherds Witnessing for the Christ They Had Found, 17-20. They did not keep to themselves the good news. They told only that "which was spoken to them." Christ was the whole subject of their testimony. Their testimony awakened little besides wonder with most. Mary "kept" in her heart and "pondered" all these wonderful revelations. That is the way to deal with God's word. The shepherds were true and wise men. They did not lose their heads. They went back to their humble toil, but they were ready to God.



Albert Edelfelt.

And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy.